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Sen. Birkholz calls for explanation of new EPA ozone attainment designation

LANSING – In response to the Environmental Protection Agency’s announcement of a new ozone attainment designation, Sen. Patty Birkholz is having the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality speak to the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee on Tuesday to explain the new designation.

“I welcome this move by the EPA as it appears this new designation will allow Michigan more flexibility when implementing their plans to reach attainment,” said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. “However, we don’t have enough information yet to know how this will affect Michigan’s economy. It’s important for the DEQ to explain this new designation to the Legislature so we know what the plans will be.”

In addition to the current non-attainment areas of marginal, moderate, serious, severe or extreme, the EPA has added a sublevel designation of basic. It appears this level, given to some areas in Michigan, is an attempt to provide more flexibility in setting up reasonable implementation plans in order to accommodate unique air quality conditions that are not entirely within control of the state or the area.

Although Michigan has made great strides in reducing air emissions, the state lies directly downwind from major industrial sources of air pollution in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Gary, over which the state exercises no control.

“We could literally shut down all industry, not operate any automobiles, lawnmowers or powerboats, and still not comply with air quality standards,” Birkholz said.

Vinson Hellwig, chief of the DEQ’s Air Quality Division, will describe to the committee the new basic designation and answer questions regarding how it will be used in the state’s planning process.

“We will be monitoring this issue closely to see how it will impact Michigan’s jobs, environment and families,” Birkholz said. “We support clean air but are concerned about keeping and recruiting businesses if costs outweigh attainment. We don’t want to anything to add more pain to our hurting economy.”

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